

# **Peaked Mountain Farm**

## **And Pollinator Sanctuary 2016 Annual Report**



Milkweed propagation greenhouse covered with the new polycarbonate covering fall of 2015.

### **Project Summary**

#### **On Farm Pollinator Awareness events went as follows:**

We held three on farm pollinator awareness events in 2015 as follows:

- Guided Pollinator Awareness walk June 6&7, 2015.
- Open Farm Day July 26, 2015 – Guided Pollinator and Wild Blueberry Awareness walks with media coverage by WABI TV5.
- Harvest Celebration August 29, 2015 - Guided Pollinator and Wild Blueberry Awareness walk.

#### **Milkweed Propagation went as follows:**

We started harvesting Common Milkweed pods on September 22, 2015 as seed for our 2016 plantings and plugs. By October 20, 2015 we had harvested 34 (1.5 lb. dried weight), mesh bags of Common Milkweed from the front field.

November 18, 2015 we started planting Butterfly Weed in the lower 4 acre portion of the front field which we have named Bumblebee Basin. This was done with direct planting into the soil and with 66 (5' x 10") tilled sections that were seeded with a Butterfly Weed seed and sand mix. We have one pound of purchased Butterfly Weed seed left with which we will start plugs with in the greenhouse in the spring of 2016. These plugs will be for sale as well as for expanding our crop of Butterfly weed in the front field. As these plugs will be produced in a greenhouse environment, germination rates are expected to be higher than any of the two direct seed methods. There can be a two to three year period of germination for milkweed planed in either of the methods previously mentioned. This could impact judgment on which of these are the best method to use.

In late November 2015 we started planting the 6.8 acre back field with Common Milkweed seed. This was planted directly into preexisting bare patches of soil and we also used a method similar to the Butterfly Weed plantings in that we planted 63 (5' x 10") tilled sections with a Common Milkweed and sand mix. We will be starting Common Milkweed plugs in the spring of 2016 from the seed we harvested this fall. These plugs will be for sale to landscapers, farmers and as retail from our farm as well as being for expanding our Common Milkweed crop in the back field. As we currently have an abundance of Common Milkweed seed, even taking into account the seed needed for seed packets and school kits, we will continue directly planting seed in the back field. The method of planting will be dependent on which method of direct planting showed the greatest germination rates. We were able to continue planting Common Milkweed in the back field up until December 26, 2015 due to the unusually warm weather we had this year.

We are finalizing layout and design of our seed packaging.

We have cut back the woody plants from our milkweed planting areas and will continue to do so as the plantings expand and as field maintenance requires.

We have established two wonderful pollinator demonstration gardens which were used extensively and greatly enjoyed by the public during our pollinator awareness walks this past summer and by the native pollinators the entire summer. These gardens will definitely be expanded upon in 2016.

Our milkweed has been certified as organic by Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). We will have to maintain proper records to keep that certification in effect. The seed harvested in the fall of 2015 is being vernalized for use in 2016.

#### **Next Steps:**

Our greenhouse is completely erected and covered. However propagation benches need to be put in place so that we may start plug production in the spring of 2016. We will be able to test the new heating system to warm the greenhouse while we are installing the benches. This greenhouse is now the largest structure on our farm.

#### **Goals & Outcomes:**

All and all the year went very well and we are on schedule to start selling Common Milkweed seed packages and Common Milkweed plugs in Jumbo six-packs with handles this spring. This is well

ahead of our expected 2017 sell date for these products as listed in our "Product Methodology and Schedule" for this grant. We are very pleased to be moving along ahead of schedule so we might possibly accomplish more than expected.

In 2015 we had Peaked Mountain Farm and Pollinator Sanctuary protected as a "Forever Farm" through the Maine Farmland Trust. This will help to ensure that all our efforts and the funds invested will not be in vain as this farm will carry on into the future long after we have passed.

We have found a greater interest than anticipated in our efforts to support native pollinators. On our 2015 Maine Open Farm Day, people arrived in inclement weather to learn about the pollinators significantly more so than to learn about our organic wild blueberries.

Based on the successes of our 2015 Maine Open Farm Day we will be holding a spectacular pollinator awareness event this year in conjunction with our 2016 Maine Open Farm Day. We will be having a pollinator awareness walk lead by Alison C. Dibble, PhD., who completed our pollinator plan in 2012, with a September rain date planned should the weather not cooperate. There are some other things that are yet to be disclosed. If we are able to do what is planned we will be the first farm in the country, possibly the world, to ever pull it off and this single aspect of our event should heighten Pollinator Awareness / Agritourism to a level never thought of before. Stay tuned!

If a Google search for "Native Pollinator Sanctuary" is made Peaked Mountain Farm and Native Pollinator Sanctuary comes up four times out of the first nine results presented. We hold the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth positions. If a Google search for "Maine Native Pollinator Sanctuary" is made Peaked Mountain Farm and Native Pollinator Sanctuary comes up six times out of the first nine results presented. We hold First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth positions. This indicates, among other things, that our digital marketing campaign has been extremely effective and positions us very well for future native pollinator awareness events as we can be easily found on the web.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

I underestimated the volume of seed that would be available from our existing crop of Common Milkweed on the farm and this crops rate of expansion. Due to unknown factors, perhaps the unusual weather patterns we had this past year, everything grew beyond our expectations. We will enter the spring 2016 market, with at least a limited product selection/quantity, a year ahead of our expected spring 2017 date. We plan to have an open house (date TBA) to introduce these offerings to the public.

Sincerely,



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